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SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN AMBASSADOR CONCERNED ABOUT ECUADOR

REF: SECSTATE 166733

1. (SBU) Summary. Colombian Ambassador Carlos Holguin Molina told the Ambassador on September 13 that his government is concerned about deteriorating bilateral relations with the Palacio government. The impending exit of FM Parra would help, but likely not resolve the festering dispute over aerial CN fumigation along the Colombia-Ecuador border, he said. The GOE referral of the dispute to the IACHR would set an unfortunate precedent which the GOC regrets. The Ambassador told Holguin we would encourage dialogue between the two neighbors. Holguin was grateful and said another opportunity to improve relations could come later this month, when President Uribe visits Quito. End Summary.

Tough Start: Amb. Faces Fumigation Issue

2. (SBU) Holguin, who arrived in Quito shortly before the Ambassador and presented his credentials on the same day, was eager to establish rapport. He lamented the recent deterioration of traditionally friendly bilateral relations between the two neighbors, blaming FM Parra for politicizing the fumigation issue. Asked by the Ambassador whether Parra's impending departure would ease pressure on the issue, Holguin demurred. Parra and Human Rights Ombudsman Claudio Mueckay, who recently filed a petition on behalf of alleged Ecuadorian victims affected by glyphosate spraying, had "put Palacio in a box" on the issue.

3. (SBU) Holguin appeared surprised to learn that the IACHR might request the "precautionary measures" requiring the GOC to halt its spraying within 10 km of the border (RefTel). He admitted that he had not received a copy of the Mueckay petition. (Note: We have, but did not share a copy with Holguin. We have faxed a copy to WHA/AND on September 12).

Ambassador Encourages Dialogue

4. (SBU) The Ambassador agreed that bilateral dialogue is preferable to international appeals to resolve the fumigation issue. That is exactly what we are encouraging the GOE to pursue. For his part, President Palacio has expressed hope that dialogue would bring mutual understanding, she said, offering an opening for President Uribe.

5. (SBU) Holguin expressed gratitude for USG support, adding that President Uribe had accepted Palacio's invitation to meet in Quito (with President Toledo of Peru) to discuss FTA strategy. The Ambassador expressed hope that the visit, focused on mutual interests, could help both countries overcome current differences. Holguin agreed.

Comment

6. (SBU) The bumps in the relationship with Colombia are more a function of the Palacio government's weakness than GOC behavior. To prevent further damage which could affect USG interests, we will coordinate closely with Holguin while trying to move the GOE towards dialogue and away from unilateral action. Parra's impending departure will help--Palacio assured the Ambassador on September 12 of his interest in "useful dialogue" to get the Ecuador-Colombia relationship "back on track." We agree that an Uribe visit focused on mutual interests could also help shift debate here. JEWELL